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RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU 0001
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0003
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SUBJECT: AFHGAN ILLEGAL MIGRATION CORRIDOR THROUGH ESTONIA

1) Summary: In the last 6 months, Afghan nationals have started using Estonia as a corridor to enter illegally the Schengen zone, primarily to reach Nordic countries perceived to be "asylum-friendly." While the Estonian Border Guard (EBG) has successfully interdicted several groups of Afghans, it readily admits that others have slipped through the cracks. Those Afghans who have been apprehended appear to be well-moneyed and have been utilizing Azeri migration facilitators. EBG officials point to anecdotal evidence of

similar up-ticks in Afghan migration through Latvia and Finland. End

Summary.

2) On July 24, Embassy Tallinn's Vice Consul met with Indrek Jogi, head of the Estonian Border Guard's Intelligence Unit, to discuss recent media reports detailing a rash of Afghan nationals illegally migrating through Estonia. Jogi confirmed that, over the last three months, 17 Afghans have been detained for unlawfully entering Estonia, while others have successfully transited through Estonia and

are presumed to have reached Sweden or Finland. Both destinations are easily accessible by ferry from Estonia. Those managing to enter

Estonian territory are crossing over from Russia along Estonia's Southeastern border -- a heavily forested region which both Estonian and Russian border guards find difficult to monitor.

3) Jogi detailed five specific cases involving Afghans, and he noted that there are further cases that he could not discuss. On May 20, the Russian Border Guard (RBG) informed the EBG about five potential border crossings into Estonia. This information was gleaned from footprints in a sand stripe on the Russian side of the border, used to monitor illegal traffic. Shortly thereafter, Swedish authorities informed the EBG that nine asylum-seeking Afghans were detained on a ferry from Tallinn arriving in Stockholm. These nine Afghans were returned to Estonia where they, subsequently, requested asylum. Each

of the nine individuals was using an Afghan passport with a forged, French Schengen visa. EBG's follow-up interviews with the detainees suggest that there were seven other Afghans aboard the same ferry, all of whom presumably managed to enter Sweden.

4) On May 26, the RBG apprehended three Afghans trying to swim across the Narva River into Estonia. The following week, the EBG apprehended five Afghans, illegally present in Estonia, along with two migration facilitators. The Afghans were returned to Russia, while the facilitators are currently in Estonian custody and awaiting criminal proceedings. Jogi stated that the facilitators were

Estonian citizens of Azeri origin. He also explained that the EBG believes these facilitators are part of an Azeri organized crime syndicate run out of Pskov and Moscow.

5) On June 28, the EBG was once again alerted by the RBG of footprints along the Southern border. [Comment: The high degree of cooperation between the EBG and the RBG, as expressed by Jogi, is noteworthy. MFA sources have also praised the strong and regular cooperation between Estonian and Russian border guards. End Comment]. Following this tip, the EBG apprehended three Afghans in the Tallinn Harbor, who were waiting to board a ferry. These individuals had ferry tickets purchased for them by their Azeri facilitators. Most recently, on July 9, four Syrians were interdicted at Tallinn Harbor. These four immediately requested asylum in Estonia. In follow-up interviews with EBG, the Syrians noted that they were aware of at least two Afghan nationals who had boarded a ferry for Stockholm the same day.

6) The going price for a facilitator and transit into and through Estonia ranges from USD 7000-9000. Accordingly, Jogi believes that the Afghans whom the EBG has encountered are educated and moneyed. He corroborates this theory by highlighting that most have been traveling with electronic gadgets generally out of reach to most Afghan citizens: mobile phones, mp3 players, etc. Jogi also underscored that those who have been arrested expressed economic motivations for their actions. While Sweden has until now been the principal destination country for Afghans due to perceptions of its "asylum friendly" policies, Jogi expects them to start traveling toward Finland more often as the journey is faster and provides more

options for onward travel. Jogi also noted that his contacts in the Finnish and Latvian Border Guards have revealed similar trends in Afghan migration patterns.

7) Conclusion: It would appear that Estonia is becoming established as a viable migration corridor for Afghan nationals who wish to reach

asylum-friendly Nordic countries, and that similar routes may be appearing via Russia through both Latvia and Finland. The relative affluence of the Afghans caught transiting Estonia may suggest that the Baltic corridor to the Nordic countries is the route of choice for those with the ability to pay.

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